

AMENDMENT TO THE SPECIFICATION

Please replace the Abstract of the Disclosure with the following Abstract:

--- ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

~~The present invention provides an~~ An image coding method ~~that efficiently compresses an image read through an optical system and significantly improves the quality of reproduced images . Image~~ An image separation section 2001 carries out image area ~~decision~~ decisions in tile (macro block) units to separate the image into photographic image tiles and character image tiles. ~~Then,~~ A layer separation section 2003 performs layer separation pixel by pixel to separate each pixel into pixels belonging to a background and pixels belonging to a foreground. Approximation processors ~~2008 and 2009~~ alleviate an increase of entropy, due to layer separation through approximation processing, and carry out JPEG-like processing on photographic images. ~~The images are then subjected to coding with variable-length codes such as arithmetic codes. The coding rate is subjected to feedback control as appropriate taking into account the performance of the apparatus. ---~~